

(12) UK Patent Application (19) GB (11) 2 374 294 (13) A

(43) Date of A Publication 16.10.2002

(21) Application No 0105916.1

(22) Date of Filing 09.03.2001

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(51) INT CL⁷
G07F 17/34

(52) UK CL (Edition T)
A6H HLM
G4V VAA

(56) Documents Cited
GB 2366435 A
EP 1063622 A2
GB 2335066 A
WO 2001/064306 A2

(58) Field of Search
UK CL (Edition T) A6H HLM, G4V VAA
INT CL⁷ G07F 17/32 17/34
Online:WPI,EPODOC,JAPIO

(54) Abstract Title
Entertainment machine with feature game

(57) A player-operable entertainment machine, such as fruit machine, has a main game, which may involve selection of symbols with rotatable reels (9), and a feature game to which play can transfer from the main game. The feature game has a trail (17) having a series of sections (18) including a transfer section (22). When play reaches the transfer section (22) a selection box (23) is then actuated. This box contains a list of outcomes (25). One of the outcomes is selectable by the player. After selection an outcome (25) may then be barred against subsequent selection. The outcomes may provide benefits or adverse actions.

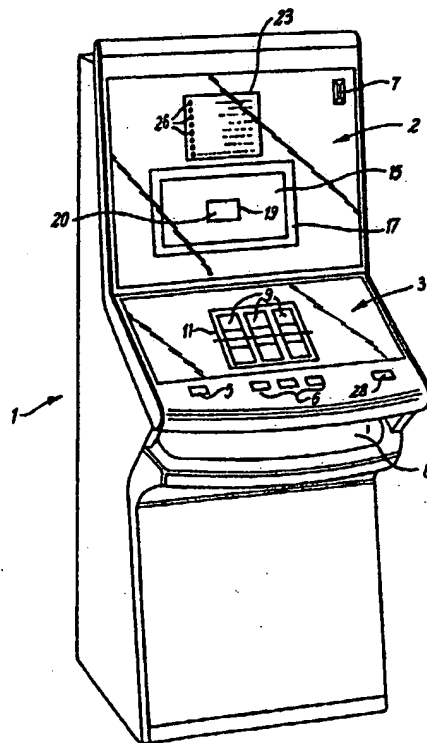


Fig. 1

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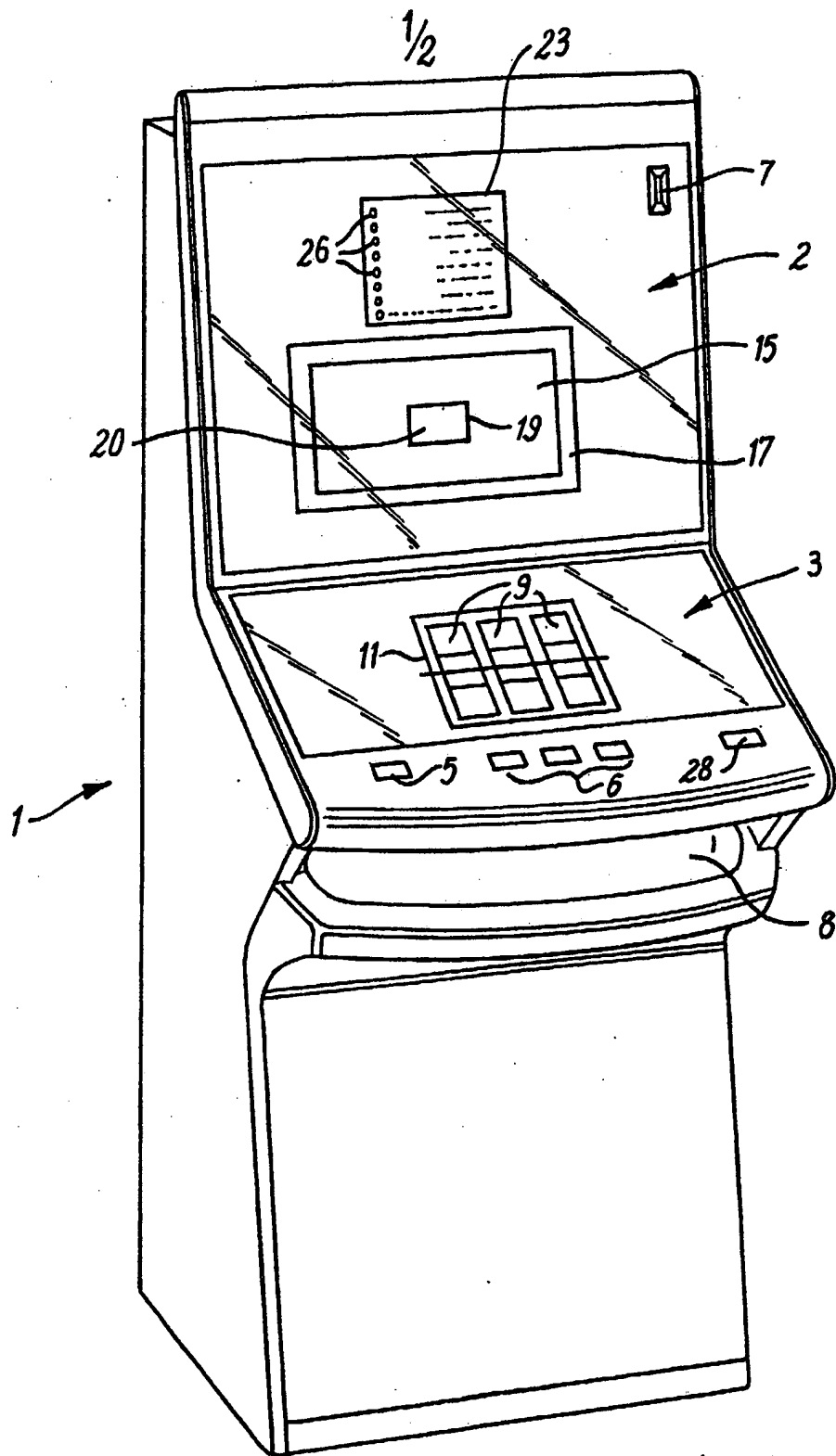
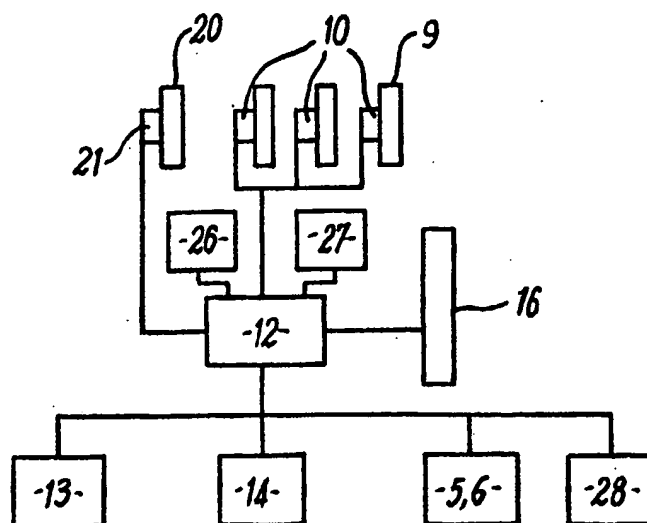
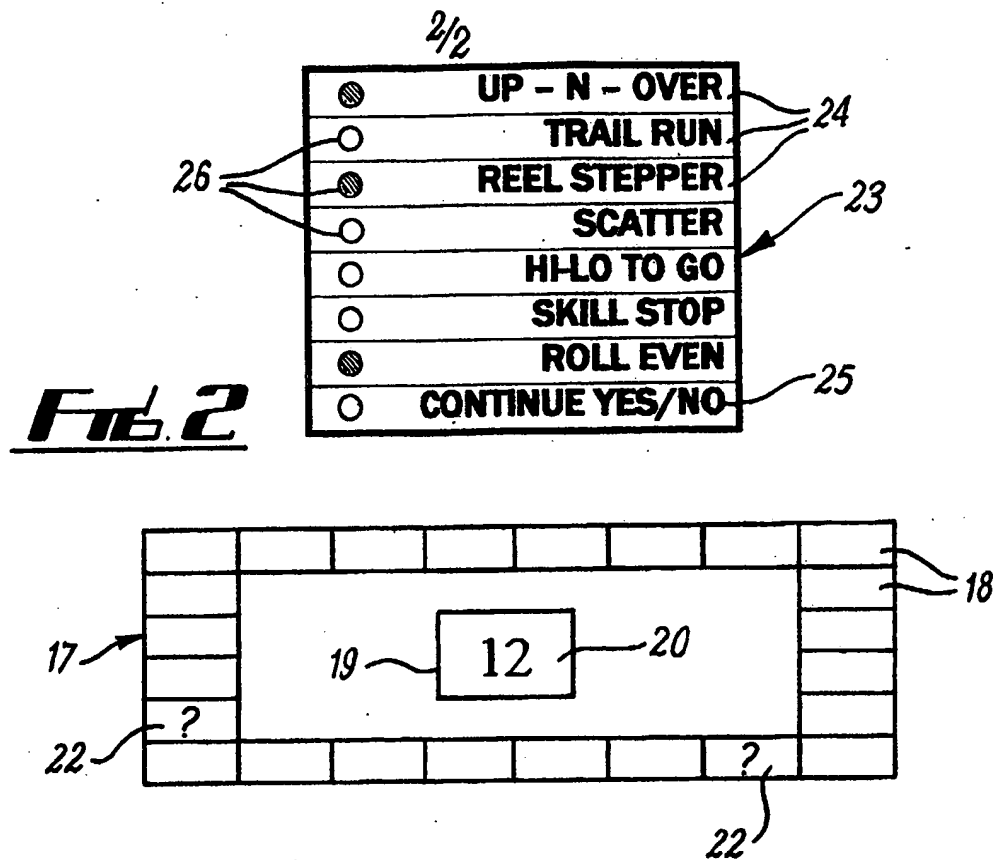


FIG. 1

20 04 11



20 0 11

ENTERTAINMENT MACHINES

This invention relates to player-operable entertainment machines, particularly coin-operated amusement with prizes (AWP) machines, such as "fruit" or "poker" machines of the kind having a main display device for displaying a selected combination of symbols at a win zone. As used herein
5 the term coin is intended also to cover tokens, charge or credit cards or any other means of supplying credit or monetary value.

The main display device of a fruit machine may comprise multiple side-by-side reels which are rotatable about a common horizontal axis within
10 a housing behind a window at the win zone. Each reel has symbols at equally spaced positions around its periphery and the reels can be brought to rest with one symbol on each reel displayed through the window on a win line.

If the displayed combination of symbols constitutes a predetermined
15 winning combination an award may be made available to the player.

It is well known to provide a supplementary display or 'feature game' which can be used to enhance the entertainment value of the machine and provide additional or alternative opportunities for winning.

For example, it is known to provide a panel having sections which
20 can be selectively illuminated to represent movement from location to location e.g. along a trail, particularly along a wraparound trail, which may simulate the playing of a board game.

Play is transferred from the main reels to the supplementary feature game on a random or predetermined basis and illumination of the panel sections may then be effected by, or in correspondence with, a rotatable subsidiary feature reel, or otherwise, representing the spin of a reel or roll of a dice or other selection.

Awards or award possibilities may be made available to the player in dependence on the location on the trail to which play has progressed.

One or more of the locations of the feature game may correspond to a selectable 'mystery' outcome feature. When play progresses to one of these locations the player is given the option of selecting an outcome e.g. by pressing a button whilst different possible outcomes are flashed rapidly on an alphanumeric display. The outcomes may correspond to bonuses or beneficial features, or may terminate further play or may otherwise be non-beneficial. Usually, the only guidance given to the player is that which can be derived from inspecting the rapidly changing display, although it is also known to provide a printed list of the range of outcomes on the machine panel.

An object of the present invention is to provide a selectable outcome feature which has enhanced entertainment possibilities.

According to the invention there is provided an entertainment machine having a feature game with a plurality of play locations through which play can advance, and a selectable outcome display linked to at least

one said play location whereby play can transfer from said play location to said selectable outcome display to allow selection from a range of outcomes characterised in that a selection device is provided which is operable to modify availability for selection of one or more of the outcomes.

5 With this arrangement, instead of being presented with the same range of outcomes, the outcomes can vary from occasion to occasion which can enhance game-playing entertainment.

 The modification of the selection availability of the outcomes may be of any suitable nature. However, in a particularly preferred embodiment the
10 modification comprises barring of outcomes so that they are not available for selection. This may occur after previous selection of an outcome i.e. such that once an outcome has been selected the same outcome cannot be selected again until the selection device is re-set e.g. at the start of a new game or at some other stage or in response to some other event.
15 Additionally or alternatively barring or other modifications may occur on a predetermined or random basis e.g. in correspondence with attaining a predetermined stage or position of play.

 Most preferably the player is provided with an indication of at least some, and preferably all of the outcomes and also is preferably provided
20 with an indication of the availability, or modification condition, of the outcomes.

 Conveniently a static display of the outcomes may be provided, such

as a printed list, with lamps alongside the outcomes which can be illuminated or extinguished to indicate barring or other modification. However, other arrangements involving e.g. alphanumeric or printed static or changing displays and indications other than illuminated lamps can be used.

With regard to the outcomes these may be of any suitable kind and may be awards or bonuses or other benefits, or may be game terminations or other adverse actions.

The outcomes may be related to or implemented during the feature game or may be effective in relation to some other stage of operation of the machine e.g. in relation to a main game of the machine as discussed hereinafter.

Thus, the beneficial outcomes may comprise cash awards, free moves, free games, scored points, game features such as 'nudges' or 'holds' or reel stepping, and which may be quantitatively determined on a random or predictable basis.

The selection of an outcome may be initiated by the player e.g. by pressing a button or it may be implemented by the machine automatically on a predictable or random basis. The player may have the option of preventing or cancelling a selection opportunity. Multiple successive selections may be possible, which may be limited by time or number of selections or by occurrence of a termination selection or otherwise.

Alternatively, only one selection may be permissible.

After selection of an outcome the player may have the option of continuing with a further selection or with the feature game or to abandon the selection or feature game.

5 In so far as the player is presented with an indication of the selections which are still fully available the player can better make a judgement as to which course to pursue, based on an assessment of the risks involved in proceeding with a re-selection or with the feature game as beneficial outcomes are eliminated.

10 The feature game preferably has the said locations arranged as successive regions of a path or trail along which play can progress e.g. in known manner as hereinbefore mentioned.

 Most preferably the machine is of the kind having a main game as well as the feature game with provision to transfer to the feature game from
15 the main game. The main game is preferably a random selection game, particularly a reel-based random selection game of an 'amusement with prizes' (AWP) machine of the fruit machine or poker machine kind as described above.

 The invention will now be described further by way of example only
20 and with reference to the accompanying drawings in which:-

Fig. 1 is a diagrammatic perspective view of one form of an entertainment machine according to the invention;

Fig. 2 is an enlarged diagrammatic view of part of the display of the machine of Fig. 1; and

Fig. 3 is a block circuit diagram of the machine.

Referring to the drawings, Fig. 1 shows a fruit machine having a floor-standing box shaped housing 1 having a front wall which includes upper and lower glass panels, 2, 3, a number of operating buttons 5, 6, a coin slot 7 and a payout opening 8.

Within the housing 1 there are three axially aligned reels 9 having say 20 symbols at regularly spaced positions around their peripheries. The reels 9 are axially rotatable and are drivably connected to respective stepper motors 10. The reels 9 are arranged behind a window 11 defined by a printed region of the lower glass panel 3. Each reel 9 can be arrested by the respective stepper motor 10 in any of 20 stopping positions in which one symbol is in precise registration with a horizontal win line in the centre of the window 11 and two further symbols are visible above and below the win line.

The stepper motors 10 are connected to a microprocessor-based control unit 12. This unit is also connected to a coin-mechanism 13, a payout mechanism 14 and the buttons 5, 6.

In use, the player inserts coins into the coin mechanism 13 through the slot 7 sufficient to generate credit for one or more games, and the machine is actuated so that a game can now be played. The game

commences after a start button 5 has been pressed and the reels 9 spin and then come to rest so as to select a combination of symbols displayed on the win line. The displayed symbol combination is assessed by the control unit 12 and a win indication is given in the event that the combination is of a predetermined winning nature.

The control buttons 6 can be used to perform 'hold' or 'nudge' functions, when made available to the player, so that the player can seek to influence the outcome of a game, in conventional manner.

The upper panel 2 is a transparent glass panel and within this there is a printed display region 15, which can be back-illuminated with a bank of lamps 16, and which provides a supplementary games feature.

As shown, this games feature comprises a wraparound trail 17 comprising a series of printed sections 18 marked with decoration, information and symbols.

In the centre of the trail there is a printed window behind which an auxiliary feature reel 20 is rotatable. The reel 20 has around its periphery the number 1 to 12 corresponding to the values which can be selected with two dice. The reel 20 can be rotated with a stepper motor 21, controlled by the control system 12, and brought to rest with one of the numbers shown through the window 19.

Play can progress around the trail 17 by successive back illumination of the sections 18 simulating movement through a number of steps

corresponding to the number selected with the feature reel 20.

One or more of the trail sections 18 are marked with one or more transfer symbols 22.

5 Above the trail there is an outcome selection box 23 with 8 sections 24 each having printed thereon a respective outcome 25. The sections 24 can be back illuminated by lamps from the bank 16. Alongside each section 24 is a respective lamp 26 which may be a bulb or LED or a back-illuminated section of the panel 2.

10 The control system incorporates a selection device 27 which controls operation of the lamps 26 in correspondence with control of selection of the outcomes as discussed hereinafter.

Play transfers to the trail 17 in the usual way on a random or predetermined bases, e.g. when predetermined transfer symbols on the main reels 9 are selected on the win line or otherwise.

15 The player can then operate a press button 28 to cause the feature reel 20 to rotate and select a number which causes play to progress along the trail 17 to a selected section 18 at which a symbol on the section 18 is back illuminated.

20 In the case where a transfer symbol 22 is illuminated play can then transfer to the selection box 23 where a play option is indicated as available e.g. by back illumination of the sections 24 and/or by back illumination of a notification on the panel 2. This transfer may occur automatically or may

require initiation or confirmation by the player e.g. by pressing a button (one of the buttons 5, 6, 28 or a further button).

5 The sections 24 may now flash in continuous repeated sequence and the player has the option, by pressing one of the buttons 5, 6, 28, or if desired a further button, not shown, to cause the flashing sequence to arrest, under the control of the device 27, with one of the sections 24 illuminated whereby the outcome indicated on the selected section 25 is made available.

10 This selection may be effected in any suitable manner relying on player skill and/or predetermined or random machine intervention. Thus, the rate of flashing may be slow enough to enable the player to try to obtain a desired selection; or it may be so fast that the selection is in effect made randomly by the player. It is also possible for the machine to make the selection automatically on a random or predictable basis in which case,
15 instead of the button, the selection may be made after a time lapse or on some other basis. Where the button is provided, the selection may be made automatically on a time-out basis if the button is not used.

 The selected outcome is then implemented, or at least made available for implementation at that time or subsequently.

20 For example, the outcome may be a move on the main reel-game such as a reel-stepper (where one or more of the reels steps down 1 position). If this results in a winning combination being displayed in the win

line an award is made available.

Alternatively the outcome indicated may be a move within another games feature (not shown in the drawings) provided in addition to the main reel and trail game.

5 The lamp 26 alongside the selected outcome is illuminated, under the control of the device 27, and the corresponding selection is now barred from availability.

10 The player may now have the choice of making a further outcome selection on the box 23, or of continuing with the feature game by progression around the trail 17, or of terminating the selection procedure and/or the feature game, by pressing one of the buttons 5, 6, 28 or otherwise.

15 The player is assisted in deciding by inspection of the state of the lamps 26 which indicate which outcomes are now barred. Where all or many of the beneficial outcomes are now barred the player may opt not to risk further selections.

 The box 23 may be re-set by the device 27 to make all outcomes again available for selection at the end of a game or after a predetermined event or other parameter.

20 In addition to outcomes being barred by prior selection, outcomes may also become barred on a different random or predictable basis e.g. as initiated automatically by the machine during play or when play progresses

to a predetermined location on the trail 17 or otherwise.

With the arrangement described above, the player is given additional possibilities for exercising skill and attaining awards in the feature game which provides additional player entertainment.

- 5 It is of course to be understood that the invention is not intended to be restricted to the details of the above embodiment which are described by way of example only.

CLAIMS

1. An entertainment machine having a feature game with a plurality of play locations through which play can advance, and a selectable outcome display linked to at least one said play location whereby play
5 can transfer from said play location to said selectable outcome display to allow selection from a range of outcomes characterised in that a selection device is provided which is operable to modify availability for selection of one or more of the outcomes.
2. A machine according to claim 1 wherein the modification comprises
10 barring of outcomes so that they are not available for selection.
3. A machine according to claim 2 wherein the barring of an outcome occurs after previous selection of that outcome.
4. A machine according to any one of claims 1 to 3 wherein the player
15 is provided with an indication of at least some of the outcomes together with an indication of their availability or modification condition.
5. A machine according to claim 4 wherein the indication comprises a static display in the form of a list with lamps which can be illuminated or extinguished to indicate barring or other modification.
- 20 6. A machine according to any one of claims 1 to 5 wherein the outcomes comprise benefits.
7. A machine according to any one of claims 1 to 6 wherein the

outcomes comprise adverse action.

8. A machine according to any one of claims 1 to 7 wherein the selection of an outcome is initiated by the player.
9. A machine according to any one of claims 1 to 8 which is a machine
5 of the kind having a main game as well as the feature game with provision to transfer from the main game.
10. A machine according to claim 9 wherein the outcomes are effective in relation to the main game.
11. A machine according to claim 9 or 10 wherein the main game is a
10 random selection game.
12. A machine according to claim 11 wherein the main game is a reel-based random selection game.
13. A machine according to claim 12 which is of the fruit machine kind.
14. An entertainment machine substantially as hereinbefore described
15 with reference to and as illustrated in the accompanying drawings.



Application No: GB 0105916.1
Claims searched: 1-14

Examiner: Mark Sexton
Date of search: 6 August 2002

Patents Act 1977 Search Report under Section 17

Databases searched:

UK Patent Office collections, including GB, EP, WO & US patent specifications, in:

UK Cl (Ed.T): A6H HLM; G4V VAA

Int Cl (Ed.7): A63F 13/00; G07F 17/32, 17/34

Other: Online: WPI, EPODOC, JAPIO

Documents considered to be relevant:

Category	Identity of document and relevant passage	Relevant to claims
X, E	GB 2366435 A (IGT-UK LIMITED) - see whole document, note especially figure 4	1,2,4-6 & 8-13
X	GB 2335066 A (IGT-UK LIMITED) - see whole document	1,2,4-6 & 8-13
X	EP 1063622 A2 (WMS GAMING, INC.) - see whole document, note particularly the 'AUCTION' bonus game	1,2,4-6 & 8-13
X	WO 01/64306 A2 (INTERNATIONAL GAME TECHNOLOGY) - see whole document, note particularly the prize selection display 422	1,2,4-6 & 8-13

X	Document indicating lack of novelty or inventive step	A	Document indicating technological background and/or state of the art.
Y	Document indicating lack of inventive step if combined with one or more other documents of same category.	P	Document published on or after the declared priority date but before the filing date of this invention.
&	Member of the same patent family	E	Patent document published on or after, but with priority date earlier than, the filing date of this application.